

ELEGANT EPISTLES

BEING A

COPIOUS SELECTION

OF

INSTRUCTIVE, MORAL, AND ENTERTAINING

LETTERS,

FROM THE MOST EMINENT

EPISTOLARY WRITERS.

VOLUME V.

BOOK IX. X.

MIDDLE OF THE 1ST CENTURY.

LONDON:

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ELEGANT EPISTLES

FROM THE

MOST EMINENT

WRITERS,

BOOK THE FIFTH.

MIDDLE OF THE LAST CENTURY.

PART I.



LONDON.

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ELEGANT EPISTLES.

BOOK THE FIFTH.

Middle of the last Century.

PART I.

LETTER I.

FROM MRS. ELIZABETH MONTAGU* TO THE
DUCHESS OF PORTLAND.

MADAM,

Hatch, 11, 1738.

YOUR grace's very entertaining letter was sent to me at sir Wyndham Knatchbull's, where I have been about three weeks, and propose returning to Mount Morris in a few days. I am as angry as I dare be with your grace, that you did not send any account of those charming fire-works, which I fancy were the prettiest things imaginable. I very

* Mr. Montagu lived to see nearly the close of the century, but we have thought proper to place her letters here, as best corresponding with their date.

Prove your love of variety in trifles, and
in things of greater moment. I think
you have great reason to call exchange robbery,
though the common saying is to the contrary. For
my part, who never saw one man that I loved, I
scarce imagine I could be fond of a dozen, and
come to that unreasonableness so ridiculously set
forth in Hyppolyto in the Tempest; at present I
seldom like above six or eight at a time. I fancy
in matrimony one finds variety in one, in the
charming vicissitudes of

“ Sometimes my plague, sometimes my darling;
Kissing to-day, to-morrow snarling.”

Then the surprising and sudden transformation of
the obsequious and obedient lover, to the graceful
haughtiness and imperiousness of the commanding
husband, must be so agreeable a metamorphosis as
is not to be equalled in all Ovid's collection, where
I do not remember a lamb's being transformed into
a bear. Your grace is much to be pitied, who has
never known the varieties I mention, but has found
all the sincerity of friendship and complacency of
a lover, in the same person; and I am sure my
lord duke is a most miserable man, who has found
one person who has taken away that passion for
change, which is the boast and happiness of so
many people. Pray tell my lord Dupplin that I
never heard of a viscount that was a prophet in
my life. I assure you I am not going to tie the
fast knot you mention: whenever I have any
thoughts of it I shall acquaint your grace with it,
and send you a description of the gentleman, with
his good qualities and faults in full length. At

present I will tell you what sort of a man which is above ten times as good as I am; for gratitude is a great virtue, and I would have cause to be thankful. He should have a great deal of sense and prudence to direct and instruct me, much wit to divert me, beauty to please me, good-humour to indulge me in the right, and reprove me gently when I am in the wrong; money enough to afford me more than I can want, and as much as I can wish; and constancy to like me as long as other people do, that is, till my face is wrinkled by age, or scarred by the small-pox: and after that I shall expect only civility in the room of love, for as Mrs. Clive sings,

" All I hope of mortal man,
Is to love me whilst he can."

When I can meet all these things in a man above the trivial consideration of money, you may expect to hear I am going to change the easy tranquillity of mind I enjoy at present, for a prospect of happiness; for I am like Pygmalion, in love with a picture of my own drawing, but I never saw an original like it in my life; I hope when I do, I shall, as some poet says, find the statue warm.

I am, madam, your most obedient humble servant,

ELIZ. ROBINSON.

LETTER II.

FROM MRS. ELIZABETH MONTAGU TO THE DUCHESS
OF PORTLAND.

MADAM,

—, 1738.

As your grace tenders my peace of mind, you will be glad to hear I am not so angry as I was. I own I was much moved in spirit at hearing you neglected your health; but since you have had advice, there is one safe step taken. As for me, I have swallowed the weight of an apothecary in medicine; and what I am the better, except more patient and less credulous, I know not. I have learnt to bear my infirmities, and not to trust to the skill of physicians for curing them. I endeavour to drink deep of philosophy, and to be wise when I cannot be merry, easy when I cannot be glad, content with what cannot be mended, and patient where there is no redress. The mighty can do no more, and the wise seldom do as much. You see I am in the main content with myself, though many would quarrel with such an insignificant, idle, inconsistent person; but I am resolved to make the best of all circumstances around me, that this short life may not be half lost in pains, “well remembering and applying, the necessity of dying.” Between the periods of birth and burial, I would fain insert a little happiness, a little pleasure, a little peace: to-day is ours, yesterday is past, and to-morrow may never come. I wonder people can so much forget death, when all we see before us is but succession;

minute succeeds to minute, season to season, summer dies as winter comes. The dial marks the change of hour, every night brings death and sleep, and morning seems a resurrection; yet, while all changes and decays, we expect no alteration, unapt to live, unready to die, we lose the present and seek the future, ask much for what we have not, thank Providence but little for what we have; our youth has no joy, our middle age no quiet, our old age no ease, no indulgence; ceremony is the tyrant of this day, fashion of the other, business of the next. Little is allowed to freedom, happiness, and contemplation, the adoration of our Creator, the admiration of his works, and the inspection of ourselves. But why should I trouble your grace with these reflections? What my little knowledge can suggest, you must know better: what my short experience has shown, you must have better observed. I am sure any thing is more acceptable to you than news and compliments, so I always give your grace the present thoughts of my heart. I beg my compliments to lady Oxford, who I hope is better.

I am, madam, your grace's most obedient
servant,

E. ROBINSON.

LETTER III.

FROM THE SAME TO THE SAME.

MADAM, *Mount Morris, Oct. 10, 1739.*

It is extremely good of your grace to continue to make me happy at a time when I can neither see

Do not hear from you. I should have written
my leaving lady Knatchbull's, but the coun-
try and the head-ach are certainly the worst cor-
respondents, as well as the dullest companions, in
the world. I have promised continually to trou-
ble you no more, having exhausted all my episto-
lary matter ; but I cannot help expressing my
gratitude to my lord duke, who is certainly a per-
son of indefatigable good-nature. I hope soon to
have the pleasure of seeing you in my way to Bath,
and beg you will give orders to your porter to ad-
mit me : for if not, as I am grown thin since my
indisposition, he will think it is my ghost and shut
the door ; and if you should afterwards read in
your visiting book, Miss Robinson from the shades
below, you will guess the meaning of it ; but re-
member I am not going to be dipped in Lethe but
the Bath water. I shall stay but a few days in
town, and then shall proceed with my father and
mother to the waters of life and recovery. My
papa's chimney-corner hyp will never venture to
attack him in a public place ; it is the sweet com-
panion of solitude, and the offspring of medita-
tion ; the disease of an idle imagination, not the
child of hurry and diversion. I am afraid that
with the gaieties of the place, and the spirits the
waters give, I shall be perfect *sal volatile*, and
open my mouth and evaporate. I wish you and
his grace much comfort, and lady Bell much joy
upon the occasion of her marriage. I imagine
she only waits for the writings. Lawyers who
live by delay, do not consider it is often the
death of love. They would rather break an im-
patient lover's heart, than make a flaw in the

writings. Then they think of the jointure, separation of the turtles, who think they can never part from, or survive, each other; at last they are convinced they loved, but that the lawyer reasoned. Your grace, by experience, knows what makes matrimony happy; from observation I can tell what makes it miserable. But I can define matrimonial happiness only like wit, by negatives; 'tis not kissing, that's too sweet; 'tis not scolding, that's too sour; 'tis not raillery, that's too bitter; nor the continual shuttlecock of reply, for that's too tart. In short. I hardly know how to season it to my taste; but I would neither have it tart, nor mawkishly sweet. I should not like to live upon metheglin or verjuice; and then, for that agreeable variety of "sometimes my plague, sometimes my darling," it would be worse than any thing; for recollection would never suffer one either entirely to love them when good, or hate them when bad. I believe your grace will easily suppose I am not a little pleased at escaping the stupidity of a winter in the country. I have heard people speak with comfort of being as merry as a cricket, but for my part I do not find the joy of being cohabitant of the fire-side with them. I am in very good spirits here, and should be so were I in a desert; I borrow from the future the happiness I expect; and from the past, by recollection, bring it back to the present. I can sit and live over those hours I passed so pleasantly with you when I was in town, and in hope enjoy those I may have the pleasure of passing with you again. I was a month at Hatch, where the good-humour of the family

every thing agreeable ; we had great
 in the house : children in cradles, and
 women in elbow chairs. I think the family
 may be looked upon like the three tenses, the
 present, past, and future. I am very glad to
 hear the marquis and the little ladies are well ;
 I beg my compliments to his grace. The hour
 for ghosts to rest is come, so I must vanish ; I
 shall appear again in a white sheet of paper ere
 long ; but what can I write from a place where
 I know nothing but that I am, your grace's hum-
 ble servant,

E. ROBINSON.

LETTER IV.

FROM MRS. ELIZABETH MONTAGU TO THE DUCHESS
 OF PORTLAND.

MADAM,

—, 1739.

As I always acquaint your grace with my motions
 from place to place, I think it incumbent upon
 me to let you know I died last Thursday ; having
 that day expected to hear of a certain duchess,
 and being disappointed, I fell into a vexation, and
 from thence into a chagrin, and from that into a
 melancholy, with a complicated *et cetera*, and so
 expired, and have since crossed the Styx, though
 Charon was loth to receive me into the boat.
 Pluto inquired into the cause of my arrival ; and
 upon telling him it, he said, *that* lady had sent
 many lovers there by her cruelty, but I was the
 first friend who was dispatched by her neglect.
 I thought it proper to acquaint you with my mis

fortune, and therefore called for the pen and ink Mrs. Rowe had used to write her Letters from the Dead to the Living, and consulted with the melancholy lovers you had sent there before me, what I should say to you.—One was for beginning, Obdurate fair ; one for addressing you in metre ; another in metaphor ; but I found these lovers so sublime a set of ghosts, that their advice was of no service to me, so I applied to the other inhabitants of Erebus. I went to Ixion for counsel ; but his head was so giddy with turning, he could not give me a steady opinion. Sisyphus was so much out of breath with walking up, all he could not make me an answer. Tantalus was so dry he could not speak to be understood ; and Prometheus had such a gnawing at his stomach he could not attend to what I said. Presently after, I met Eurydice, who asked me if I could sing a tune, for Pluto had a very good ear, and I might release her for ever, for though

“ Fate had fast bound her,
With Styx nine times round her,
Yet singing a tune was victorious.”

I told her I had no voice, but that there was one lady Wallingford in the other world, who could sing and play like her own Orpheus, but that I hoped she would not come thither a great while. The Fatal Sisters said they had much fine thread to spin for her yet, and so madam Eurydice must wait with patience. Charon says the packet-boat is ready, and ghosts will not wait, so I must take my leave of you to my great grief ; for, as Bays in the Rehearsal says, ghosts are not obliged to

My sense, I could have added a great deal more. Pluto gives his service, and Proserpine is your humble servant. We live here very elegantly; we dine upon essence, like the duke of Newcastle; we eat and drink the soul and spirit of every thing; we are all thin and well-shaped, but what most surprised me was to see sir Robert Austin*, who arrived here when I did, a perfect shadow; indeed I was not so much amazed that he had gone the way of all flesh, as to meet him in the state of all spirit. At first I took him for sir ———, his cousin; but upon hearing him say how many ton he was shrunk in circumference, I easily found him out. I shall wait patiently till our packet wafts me a letter from your grace: being now divested of passion, I can, as a ghost, stay a post or two under your neglect, though flesh and blood could not bear it. All that remains of me is your faithful shade,

E. ROBINSON.

P. S. Pray lay up my letter where it cannot hear the cock crow, or it will vanish, having died a maid. There are a great many apes who were beaux in your world, and I have a promise of three more who made a fine figure at the last birth-day, but cannot outlive the winter.

Written from Pluto's palace by darkness visible.

* A very fat man.

LETTER V.

FROM MRS. ELIZABETH MONTAGU TO THE DUCHESS
OF PORTLAND.

MADAM,

Bath, Jan. 7, 1740.

THE pleasure your grace's letter gave me, convinced me that happiness can reach one at Bath, though I think it is not an inhabitant of the place. I pity your confinement with the reverend assembly you mentioned. It is very unreasonable of people to expect one should be at home, because one is in the house. Of all privileges, that of invisibility is the most valuable. Lord — was wheeled into the rooms on Thursday night, where he saluted me with much snuff and civility, in consequence of which I sneezed and courtesied abundantly. As a further demonstration of his loving kindness, he made me play at commerce with him. You may easily guess at the charms of a place where the height of my happiness is a pair royal at commerce, and a peer of threescore. Last night I took the more youthful diversion of dancing; our *beaux* here may make a rent in a women's fan, but they will never make a hole in her heart; for my part, lord N. Somerset has made me a convert from toupets and pumps, to tie wigs and a gouty shoe. Ever since my lord duke reprimanded me for too tender a regard for lord Craufurd's nimble legs, I have resolved to prefer the merit of the head to the agility of the heels; and I have made so great a progress in my resolution as to

like the good sense which limps, better than the lively folly which dances. But to my misfortune he likes the queen of spades so much more than me, that he never looks off his cards, though were I queen of diamonds, he would stand a fair chance for me. I hope the Bath waters are as good for the gout in the heart as the gout in the stomach, or I shall be the worse for the journey. Lord Ailseford, lady Ann Shirley, lady S. Paulet, &c. &c. are here; miss Grenville, miss Berkeley, and lady Hereford. Mr. Mansell came last night to the ball. We have the most diverting set of dancers, especially among the men; some hop and some half in a very agreeable variety. The dowager duchess of Norfolk bathes; and being very tall, had nearly drowned a few women in the Cross Bath, for she ordered it to be filled till it reached her chin, and so all those who were below her stature, as well as her rank, were forced to come out or drown; and finding it, according to the proverb, in vain to strive against the stream, they left the bath rather than swallow so large a draught of water. I am sorry for the cruel separation of your grace and miss Dashwood; I believe no one parts with their friends with greater reluctance than you do; and how they part with you I have a melancholy remembrance. I am of your opinion, that one may easily guess at the depth of an understanding, whose shallows are never covered by silence. It is now pretty late, and I will end my scandalous chronicle of Bath. I beg my best compliments to my lord duke and to lady Wallingford. I am, &c.

E. ROBINSON.

LETTER VI.

FROM MRS. ELIZABETH MONTAGU TO THE DUCHESS
OF PORTLAND.

MADAM,

Bath, Jan. 30, 1740.

IT is said, expectation enhances the value of a pleasure. I think your letters want nothing to add to the satisfaction they give, and I would not have your grace take the method of delay to give a zest to your favours; however, your letter did give me the greatest pleasure; I must have been sunk in insensibility if it had not made me happy. I have long been convinced it was in your power to give me happiness, and I shall begin to think health too, for I have been much better ever since I received it. I hope the duke is entirely well of his new disorder; I am sure his grace will never have it much, for it is a distemper always accompanied by peevishness; and as he has not the smallest grain of that in his composition, he can never have a constitution troubled with the gout. What will this world come to now duchesses drink gin and frequent fairs! I am afraid your gentlemen did not pledge you, or they might have resisted the frost and fatigue by the strength of that comfortable liquor. I want much to know whether your grace got a ride in the flying coach, which is part of the diversion of a fair. I am much obliged to you for wishing me of the party: I should have liked it extremely. When you go